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AUTHOR Wilson, John S.
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ABSTRACT

An examination of 20 library network terminations reveals five major reasons for termination: lack of adequate funding, absorption by larger networks, loosely structured governance, partial termination of services, and networks programmed for short durations. Two tables present survey data. (RAA)

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NETWORK TERMINATIONS:

A Compilation of Possible Answers

John S. Wilson
1980 Graduate of the
College of Librarianship
University of South Carolina
Columbia, S. C.

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PURPOSE:

The purpose of this project was to attempt to determine the reason or reasons for the termination of networks by compiling first hand comments and insights from the directors of these networks and other personnel associated with them.

METHOD:

The American Library Directory was consulted in order to obtain the names and addresses of all networks recognized by the American Library Association throughout the United States and Canada. Directories for the years 1974 thru 1979 were consulted. If a network appeared in every issue, it was assumed that this network was still functional. Any network which could not be traced through every issue was noted. From March 4 thru March 15, 1980, a total of 98 letters of inquiry were mailed to the directors of these networks at their last known address.

DISCUSSION OF DATA:

A total of 98 surveys were mailed. Of the 46 responses received, 20 of these (43%) were from networks which had terminated. After careful study it was found that the majority of these could be divided into five basic catagories as to reasons for termination.

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1) Lack of adequate funding appeared to be the most common cause of network termination. Most of the responses were not specific as to why the funding ceased or where their source of funds originated. However, it appeared as though most were funded through special grants from the Federal government or in some cases, through endowments from large corporations.

One example of this is Technical Educational Consortium, Inc., (TEC). According to Anne Maio, Reference Librarian at the University of Hartford, Conn., "the Consortium was originally established in the 1960's by the computer industry (IBM & Honeywell), to give schools money and computers to train technicians for the industry throughout the country and abroad. Guidelines for the consortium were coordinated with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. IBM decided it could no longer afford to supply the computers (and no longer had a problem finding trained technicians), so the Consortium became inactive."

2) Many networks have been absorbed by larger networks in order to provide more improved services at a lower cost. Others have disbanded because they have found that new technology has allowed them greater access to other systems. One example of this was Captain Library Services Corp., a network basically involving Princeton and Rutgers Universities. This organization found that, "OCLC satisfied the same purposes as Captain and at less expense."

3) Loosely structured governance seemed to be another cause of network termination. One such organization was the New River Valley Library Consortium in Virginia. According to its past director, Dr. C. Edward Huber, "The NRVLC was a loose and barely formal group of academic and public library directors who sought and failed to find a common ground of concerns."

4) This catagory concerned the partial termination of network services. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) discontinued its Library Resources and Continuing Education Program and began a new program which eventually became known as the Western Interstate Library Coordinating Organization (WILCO). Another example of partial network termination occurred with the termination of communications and coordinations center of Trisnet. It was to be replaced by Tris-on-Line by April 1, 1980.

5) This final category dealt with networks which were programmed to self destruct. Examples of this type included Talinet and Salinet. These networks were both successful experiments, funded by H.E.W., which ceased functioning when their grant period concluded.

The majority of the responding networks seemed to have terminated due to a combination of any of the five catagories. The Community College Library Cooperative in Washington cited "organizational problems" and "insuffient revenue" as causes for their network's termination.

The fact that the majority of the responses were extremely vague as to reasons for termination of their networks made it difficult to classify them or to pinpoint one specific cause of termination. Numerous other problems were encountered during the course of the survey. Two of these dealt with the use of the American Library Directory.

Various networks and consortia send information to the ALA for publication in the Directory. When a network changes its name, there is little or no cross referencing to connect the previous name with its present title, except in the cases of major networks such as Ballots to RLIN. Thus, it appears as if a network has ceased functioning because it does not appear under the same title in the following year's Directory.

Another instance of not being able to trace a network had a very different result. "The Maryland Association of Community and Junior Colleges was never really a consortium or network," wrote Harold E. Stark, Head of Library Services at Harford Community College. "It was a professional organization with a Learning Resources Division. I had it removed from our entry in the ALA Directory because mention of it was misleading."

Many of the directors surveyed seemed to have varying opinions as to the definition of a network, and some of these did not feel as though their organization should be classified as such. One of these was Maryann Kevin Brown, former director of WILCO, now director of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

She wrote, "WILCO was not a network as you might perceive it. Its role was that of a facilitator, organizer, and planner."

A third difficulty arose when the attempt was made to trace past directors of defunct networks. There was no means by which forwarding addresses for these people could be obtained. This was a major cause of letters returned without forwarding addresses or responses from personnel presently employed at the location in which the network was housed, who were not familiar with the defunct network because the previous director had left.

Another variable which must be taken into account was the fact that slightly more than half of the questionnaires were mailed using the word "failure" when referring to network termination. A response from Collin Clark of the California State Library, charged that the word "failure" was, "surely too simplified a term to have much meaning." Thus, the survey letter was revised to read, "network termination" in place of "network failure". However, it could not be determined whether or not this had any effect on the responses of others.

CONCLUSIONS:

This study has only touched the surface of the network termination mystery. I have attempted to catagorize and compile the information which I received from the participants and have put forth five plausable reasons for network termination. I believe that the studies concerning network success have just begun to be published and it will be several years before researchers begin in-depth studies concerning network termination.

TABLE I
Responses to Survey

	Number Received	%
INCORRECT INFORMATION FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY DIRECTORY		
Networks still functioning as originally planned - no changes	16	35%
Networks still functioning but with name changes	6	14%
Networks still functioning but with funding changes	2	4%
Libraries never associated with a network	2	4%
TOTAL	26	57%
TERMINATED NETWORKS	20	43%
TOTAL RESPONSES	46	100%

TABLE II
Letters With no Response

Letters Returned to Sender - No Forwarding Address	8	15%
Letters Unanswered	44	85%
TOTAL LETTERS - NO RESPONSE	52	100%